

Section 5: Identifying Skills for Preparing Profiles

The goal of the guidelines is to help you produce epidemiologic profiles that are consistent in content, format, usefulness, and quality for prevention and care so as to promote comparability across jurisdictions and the equitable allocation of scarce resources to populations most in need. The guidelines dictate a common set of standards and principles for epidemiologic profiles. The achievement of these goals relies in part on the skills and knowledge of the profile writers and the resources available to them. However, the personnel, expertise, and resources for preparing HIV/AIDS epidemiologic profiles differ by service area.

A Multidisciplinary Approach

A multidisciplinary team approach is recommended, even if one person takes the lead in writing the profile. A team can reduce strain on local resources (i.e., one person who prepares the profile in addition to other responsibilities) and bring multiple skills and experience to the work.

Skills for a multidisciplinary team

A multidisciplinary team should include persons with knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- familiarity with clinical aspects of HIV/AIDS and its treatment
- familiarity with the local HIV/AIDS epidemic
- familiarity with strengths and limitations of available data sources
- skills in data analysis and interpretation
- knowledge of, and experience with, programs and research
- knowledge of the needs and duties of the prevention and care planning groups (setting priorities among populations, interventions, and services)
- understanding of how the epidemiologic profile relates to HRSA and CDC requirements for needs assessment and gap analysis
- knowledge of the data needs of the people carrying out prevention and care programs
- knowledge of policy issues
- knowledge and acceptance of the tenets of applicable confidentiality protocols
- ability to communicate to a diverse audience in user-friendly language

Desired Proficiencies

Whether the profile is being prepared by in-house staff or a consultant(s), certain minimum skills and knowledge are needed to ensure a valid, useful profile. Additional capabilities can enhance the development of the profile.

Minimum knowledge base

- knowledge of HIV/AIDS surveillance systems
- knowledge of basic principles of epidemiology and statistics
- basic knowledge of CDC and HRSA programs in HIV/AIDS prevention and care
- understanding of the confidential nature of HIV/AIDS and other data (e.g., restrictions in reporting small numbers)

- familiarity with the local HIV/AIDS epidemic
- understanding of how data are collected and the strengths and weaknesses of the data
- ability to interpret data from HIV/AIDS and other surveillance systems to make inferences for HIV prevention and care planning

Minimum skills

- statistical skills
 - using descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, median, frequency, percentage, statistical relationships)
 - calculating rates
 - assessing trends over time
- computer skills
 - word processing
 - use of basic statistical and graphics software (e.g., Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint, Epi Info, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Statistical Analysis Software)
- writing and speaking skills, including the ability to communicate difficult concepts clearly to a variety of end users
- interpersonal skills and ability to work with persons from diverse backgrounds and disciplines

Special Considerations: Working with a Consultant

Some planning groups may wish to employ a consultant to prepare or assist in preparing the profile. For example, a small EMA with limited resources might hire an epidemiologist from a local university to work with the planning groups.

When using a consultant, be sure to observe the following:

- Develop a contract that clearly delineates the scope of work, the timeline, and ownership of the final product (the final document should be in the public domain [i.e., not copyrighted]; the consultant should acknowledge the source when publishing work that includes information from the profile).
- Choose a person with the skills and experience necessary to execute the work defined in the scope of work (some consultants may need help understanding CDC and HRSA requirements, and the added “costs” of ensuring that the consultant is knowledgeable enough to complete the work should be factored into your planning for the time and resources you will need to develop the profile).
- Provide ongoing supervision and oversight of the consultant’s work; build in supervision through such activities as periodic reviews of drafts.
- Ensure that people who have experience with, and expertise in, collecting and working with surveillance data review drafts of the profile.
- Ensure that consultants who need access to, or use, confidential public health surveillance data (e.g., HIV, STD, TB data) be required to adhere to confidentiality and data release restrictions and be subject to penalties for violating these restrictions.

For more guidance on choosing and working with a consultant, see the HRSA HIV/AIDS Bureau, Evaluation Monograph Series Report 1, *Choosing and Using an External Evaluator* (<http://www.hab.hrsa.gov/tools/topics/monographs.htm>).

Population at risk in specified period
